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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000799

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SUBJECT: THE POLITICS OF SPRAWL IN ANKARA'S NEIGHBORHOODS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for reasons 1.4(b)  
,(d)

11. (C) Summary. In visits to three of Ankara's poorer neighborhoods, we found officials and residents grappling with rural to urban migration challenges, unemployment and a political system that leaves many feeling unheard. As Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections approach, political parties will be tapping into this voter base. They are likely to face some tough questions about prior unmet promises and development plans that smack of political paybacks as much as promoting community welfare. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is well-organized to reach its grass-roots supporters in these areas; voters with other views are still looking for a party that truly represents their interests. End Summary.

MAMAK

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12. (C) The bustle in Mamak, one of Ankara's original squatter neighborhoods with approximately 500,000 residents, belies the tension still generated by a steady flow of migration from central Anatolian farm regions such as Yozgat, Corum and Sivas. The sub-governor, near the top of the town's officialdom, and the mukhtar, a sort-of elected registrar, both admitted that balancing the needs and expectations of new arrivals is a continuing challenge. The small, single-storey houses that cover Mamak's hillsides are rapidly being bulldozed and replaced with highrise apartment complexes touted by city officials as improvements. The sub-governor acknowledged that the new approach threatens the close-knit village structure that has provided stability to Mamak's impoverished communities. He then disclosed a "secret" plan to tear down 14,000 additional squatter homes in the near future. The government hasn't yet informed residents, he said. Officials plan to meet with developers of similar projects to learn about pitfalls and successes before breaking the news.

13. (SBU) Residents we spoke with in a predominately Alevi area preferred the village feel of their humble homes and tiny gardens, with low rock walls separating them from friends and relatives. They feared the loss of community and integrated mix of Alevi and Sunni, secular and religious neighbors that has developed over the years as residents transition from rural Anatolia to urban life. Even if they had a choice to stay, many will take the government's highrise offer for their childrens' sake, they said. Under the present terms, each family will receive at least two apartments - one to live in and one to rent for income. They are waiting for further details about unit size, location and title formalities. Mamak's mayor claimed efforts would be made to locate family groups in the same buildings to preserve existing support networks as much as possible.

14. (C) About one-third of each highrise is allocated to the

city for sale, according to the mayor. Profits from the sales generate revenues for public improvements, such as home-based carpet weaving enterprises, community computer training classes and the hillside cement waterfall "monument". Mamak boasts a new marble and steel city hall, improved paved roads and drainage system and an impressive video featuring the mayor and his vision for Mamak's future. He proudly showed us the open-space office plan of the municipal building, noting that secret cameras feeding into his office help keep him aware of his employees' activities and productivity.

15. (C) Residents of the Alevi community we visited, admitted political opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), derided the AKP mayor's improvements and suggested that few profit more from the highrise projects than the mayor and his fellow officials. Neither the mayor nor representatives from the residents' party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), have responded to community efforts to relocate an unhealthy city dump that encroaches on their village. They had particular scorn for the mayor, who had allowed construction of a sizeable mosque in their predominately Alevi neighborhood despite their objections. Many in the Alevi group told us they do not plan to vote in upcoming parliamentary elections because none of the parties represent their views: they fear the AKP will erode Turkey's secular system but see no vision or leadership from the CHP or other leftist parties to combat the threat. Until Turkey's political process becomes truly democratic, they expressed little confidence that their voices would be heard.

GOLBASI

16. (SBU) On the banks of the Mogan Lake, to the southwest of

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Ankara, suburban Golbasi is booming. The main anchors of Golbasi's economy are stone works, recreation and day tourism, villa construction and maintenance, and education. An area that draws both the young -- private schools and several university campuses reside here -- and well-heeled retirees looking for a quiet lakeview home, Golbasi's property values are soaring, according to district sub-governor Hakki Uzun. Mayor Abdulnasir Haslak (AKP) showed off a variety of development projects, including lakeview villas and a new women-only recreation center downtown -- the mayor hastened to assure us that men are not barred from the center, it was merely a facility for women to feel more comfortable.

17. (SBU) The Chamber of Drivers and Motorists complained bitterly that the AKP government had been transferring authority for licenses and driver education courses upward to the Ministry of Transportation; as a result of targeted legal and procedural changes, the chamber has suffered drastically reduced membership and lost revenue and has had to cut its staff from nine to four. The president of the chamber had voted for AKP in 2002, but after the past few years, he said he's looking for a new party to support.

18. (SBU) Conversation with the village mukhtar's family in nearby Yaylabag provided a window into the economic challenges of changing village life. Yaylabag is a cluster of stone houses tucked into a creek valley. The surrounding farmland attests to an earlier, rural lifestyle. The mukhtar's wife says that animal husbandry and small farms are all but dead now. She claims she can't even cover the cost of family laundry with the pittance she makes from milk production. At least one aspect of modern life is easier: water now comes directly to the house. Everyone in the village has a car now, and most go into Golbasi or Ankara to work. Although some leave the village for economic reasons, at least a few have moved back upon retirement, finding the fresh air and green space more to their liking than the city's walls of concrete. The mukhtar's daughter-in-law married into the family -- having never met her husband -- at

age 15, to help her ailing mother-in-law with the household chores (which her sons had refused to do). The married son is away on military service, and the bride, now 18, has visited him in Konya three times. These women expressed no interest in politics, although they claim they will vote and that their husbands will not dictate their choices. The mukhtar's wife, who became pious later in life, says she likes to discuss religion, to which her daughter-in-law jokingly replied, "Where will I find anyone for you to talk to?"

#### ALTINDAG

¶9. (SBU) Altindag (literally, "gold mountain"), which comprises the heart of original Ankara but has been neglected for many years is, like Mamak, home to many migrants and poorer Turks. Though a business center whose population doubles by day, many residents have never seen the city's citadel, old parliaments or other tourist attractions within Altindag's boundaries. Altindag's current mayor, Veysel Tiryaki, from the ruling AKP, is a former sub-governor who has taken the urban renewal bull by the horns. He slashed bloated city hall employment by 60 percent and claims another half of those remaining need to go. He has ceded an entire wing of city hall offices to a nearby hospital. Unlike his Mamak counterpart, he says he and his staff have been active in taking their message to the people to convince them why their village houses must make way for broader streets, municipal services, green spaces, recreational facilities and, of course, the ubiquitous apartment towers that increasingly dominate Ankara's urban landscape.

¶10. (SBU) Tiryaki openly describes the reaction of trade unions from right and left as reviling him, and of the initial unhappiness of the temporarily displaced people. He has also torn down countless "illegally" built businesses. He maintains that while his detractors remain, once people see the revitalized neighborhoods and particularly the parks and recreational facilities, most are won over. Tiryaki wields a well-designed "before and after" powerpoint presentation.

¶11. (SBU) The greater municipality of Ankara has also invested in a number of youth centers, one of which is located in the center of Altindag. The idea is to get the youth, both educated and uneducated, off the streets and learning something productive. It's an impressive facility, run by a 30-something former wrestler. They require registraton on premises (currently they have approximately 4,500 registrants), good behavior, and attendance at classes.

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They offer computer classes, sports, music, art and a variety of other disciplines. A bonus: literacy classes for the teens' parents - mostly women - who never learned to read and write.

¶12. (C) COMMENT. The AKP mayors have taken real risks in running the bulldozers through greater Ankara's makeshift neighborhoods. If people are happy with the results, it will help AKP nationally in this fall's parliamentary elections. If they remain disgruntled, voters may go elsewhere or not vote at all. The mayors' efforts are definitely changing Ankara's landscape from the hallmark shantytowns that pirated electricity as minimal city services were extended to them, to a slicker, cookie-cutter urban look with all the amenities but none of the village warmth, charm or social mix. End Comment.

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